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ABSTRACT

Most school practitioners lack the knowledge to initiate major school-community collaboration efforts. This paper highlights two collaborative programs implemented in South Carolina secondary schools--one in mental health and one in conflict resolution. The paper presents an overview of the "how" of collaboration and suggests changes in university preparation programs to help administrators develop skills for managing collaborative efforts. Families and Neighborhood Schools (FANS) was South Carolina's first collaborative effort (1990) between schools and mental-health agencies to provide community services to students and their families. A program based on the FANS model was established in 1994 at a high school to address student needs related to school success, dropping out, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, criminal conduct, and conflict resolution. A peer-mediation program called Students Making Alternative Resolutions Together (SMART) is also described. The paper identifies issues to be explored by partners before asking for interagency help and describes participants' roles and the open-agenda collaborative process. Leadership skills for possible inclusion in administrator-preparation programs are listed. One table is included. (LMI)

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THE HOW of COLLABORATION *

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-- Excerpts from a work in progress. Authors will appreciate critique and response.

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The *How* of Collaboration

Abstract

Social demise including teen violence, pregnancy, drop-outs, and dysfunctional families impede efforts to create quality schools. Schools must restructure as hubs of support services to alleviate obstacles to academic achievement and to develop a sense of community. Most school practitioners, however, don't know how to initiate major school-community collaboration. Highlighting two South Carolina secondary programs in mental health and conflict resolution which are currently influencing legislation, this paper overviews the *how of collaboration* and suggests changes in university preparation programs for developing these requisite administrative skills.

First...the *Why*

National demographics paint a bleak picture for youth in school today and in the future. Hodgkinson (1992) has pointed out the increasing poverty and refers to the problem as "Education's leaking roof." Greenville County, South Carolina, has demographic problems similar to the national picture. Rather than continuing school as "business as usual," some educators and others there have taken some action. That set of actions provides the base for discussion of the *how* of collaboration.

Public media have identified problems of today's youth ranging from poverty, learning disabilities, gangs, violence, mayhem and even murder. Newspaper headlines glare hard reminders: "More kids live in changing family" (USA Today, 9/1/94); "Gun-toting epidemic among kids: (USA Today, 10/14/94); "Parents less involved in older children's schools" (Greenville, SC, News 9/94); "Violence on rise among young people" and "Support for teachers is vital to helping students improve" (Wilmington, DE, Sunday News Journal, 1/8/95). With major changes in the context for education--changes that have important impacts on the youngsters in school and on their families--it seems only reasonable that educators should consider changes needed in the education "system" that serves these people.

Why Bother?

"Restructuring" is tossed around as a generic cure for all that ails public schools. We should change the course offerings to be "global"; use alternative scheduling options for a dawn-to-dusk school day; team teachers, and adopt all the business strategies designed to make us more participatory, effective, and efficient. While the options are almost endless, they are pointless without the one saving grace needed to make schools stronger--*invite the community to be a part of school again*. This time, we must invite supporters to help practitioners identify and address the social issues tearing at community members' children, luring them away from traditional educational and community values, and producing the most violent, turbulent times in American schools. Schools and communities need to

collaborate to stay afloat during a storm of crime, educational neglect (from both sides), traditional family collapse, teen[illegible] pregnancy, and, in general, the death of "Happy Days."

Next...the *What*

School and community have united forces in Greenville, South Carolina, to combat adverse demographics negatively influencing school success. "Families and Neighborhood Schools" (FANS) is South Carolina's first collaborative effort between schools and mental health to provide holistic community services to students and families as an a school-based program. In 1990, personnel at Bryson Middle School (n=1200) combined energies and service delivery models with The South Carolina Department of Mental Health, Piedmont Center for Mental Health, Department of Juvenile Justice, and the University of South Carolina (USC) to provide students school-based, individual clinical therapy; voluntary programs for emotional development, social skills, and academic assistance; and alternatives to juvenile incarceration. The program offered teachers classroom support and professional assistance. For many parents, FANS offered a much-needed helping hand within the context of a friendly and familiar environment, school.

An 18-month research project (1992-1993), utilizing all collaborative agency resources, targeted at-risk 6th graders (n=59) and compared their progress to not "at-risk" 6th graders (n=275). At-risk students were identified by grade retention and age, attendance, academic achievement, discipline records, and/or serious personal or family trauma (sick, dying, or incarcerated parent; severe personal medical conditions, etc.). All project objectives were met or exceeded in regards to students' academic achievement, attendance, and behavior. Approximately 33% of the student body participated in voluntary group counseling on issues of choice such as divorce, stress management, conflict resolution, etc. This rate presently continues (1995). Parenting skills classes, professional staff development efforts, and community involvement were integral components of FANS and also continue.

Using a similar format, the collaborators established a FANS-type program (1994) at Woodmont High School (n=850) to address student needs related to school success, drop-out causes, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, criminal conduct, and conflict resolution. MetLife Education Foundation joined the original collaborators and assisted by funding initial program development of South Carolina's first high school peer mediation program, "***S***tudents ***M***aking ***A***lternative ***R***esolutions ***T***ogether" (SMART), sanctioned by the South Carolina and Upstate Mediation Networks, two other collaborators. Another major purpose of SMART was to plan an approach with mental health staff and university personnel to diversify services to all of Woodmont's elementary and middle feeder schools to produce South Carolina's first multiagency cluster program.

Using school, community, and business focus groups as sources of needs assessment, in 1994 Piedmont Mental Health, Woodmont High School, and USC collaborated to plan a research design for intervention efforts affecting school success and negative social influences. The team concentrated research efforts on potential dropouts in the 9th grade who were part of a special "school within a school." They were identified by standardized

test scores, discipline and arrest records, truancy, and stigmatizing social issues. University professors, doctoral student interns, and mental health personnel assisted educators at Woodmont to design the research base, deliver human services, supply academic assistance, provide staff development, coordinate mediation services and training, and share results for individual as well as joint agendas.

Then...the *How*

Many people and articles express ideas about *what* should be done in schools. Few publications explain *how* people should make success happen. Seeking "a sense of community" to infiltrate the total educational process does not come naturally to most practitioners, even though many educators profess that they need the public's help in meeting the needs of students. Schools have been cells of isolation for so long that far too *many principals do not know* ***how*** *to escape the traditional school structure.*

Seeking new avenues of support for problems affecting student achievement and for building effective schools requires different leadership styles than many principals currently use. This style shift can be a personally and professionally threatening undertaking--as well as an exciting discovery. Educators must be ready for the exploration. Issues beyond the school walls now invade--and too often conquer--the once traditional structure of school life. To launch a strategic counterattack, educators must learn to organize focus groups of parents, teachers, agency personnel, and community leaders to begin the collaborative process.

All parties must converge in unity of purpose, devoid of "turf tussles," to solve issues through problem-based learning. To identify and to conquer obstacles to unity, educators must examine closely and challenge aggressively certain issues that present enormous barriers to successful interagency collaboration. Principals, especially, must undergo a soul-searching to decide if collaboration can be part of their educational philosophies and leadership styles. They must decide the following issues for their schools:

- **Do we really *want* outside help with our school?**
- ***Why* do we want this help--for programs, social issues, emotional barriers?**
- **Can we let down our barriers, work through *turf* issues of power, and be patient with outsiders who need additional knowledge of the political agenda of schools?**
- **Can we *accept* interagency help without being defensive and uninviting?**
- **Are we ready for true *examination* of our needs, problems, weaknesses in order to promote a stronger school?**
- **How many community *voices* can we hear at once, or do we need to hear only a select few?**
- **Can we adjust to sharing leadership roles in order to promote more *"win-win"* situations--all in students' favor?**

Systemic restructuring must include a broader identification of the problems facing public schools to include America's changed social mores, the quickly increasing non-traditional family, and the Goliath of all social and school problems: escalating youth violence, gang-related activities, and general disregard for authority. Teachers and principals must invite *outsiders to be insiders* in order to identify the true problems blocking students' school successes and to share the responsibility of solutions.

Although learning the subtleties of collaboration is a must; it isn't just a step-by-step recipe. It's a "happening" that occurs in pieces, with the pieces held together by an almost tangible spirit and determination to do something that works for kids. Collaboration is more work on principals and teachers and requires new skills. The "how to" process is filled with open and hidden agenda that present obstacles to traditionalists.

Open Agenda

Like most tasks and crafts, learning *how* to collaborate requires skills not easily taught but acquired through trial and error: practice, failure, practice, success. Sometimes intuition will be the driving force behind decisions: they just "feel" right. The basic process is listed below in a "ten easy steps" format. The political behaviors of collaboration, however, needed to make the process work can only be assessed by the participants in their unique communities; no one recipe works for everyone.

1. Identification of one community resource collaborator for program development **(Resource Collaborator)**
2. Assessment of school needs for academic achievement **(Academic Support)**
3. Assessment of present or changing demographics and needed student support programs **(Demographics/Environmental Scan)**
4. Meetings with focus groups of students, parents, teachers and staff, community and business leaders for program planning and acceptance **(Focus Groups)**
5. Identification of funding through conventional and nonconventional sources **(Funding)**
6. Development of one or two programs for one grade or for one identified target student audience **(Program Development)**
7. Inclusion of limited number of teachers in program development and implementation but open communication with all staff **(Teacher Participation)**
8. Identified evaluative procedures **(Evaluation Procedures)**
9. Informal evaluative conferences for periodic "pulse checks" **(Evaluative Conferences)**
10. Formal evaluation of project by data and focus groups **(Focus Groups)**

Table 1 summarizes the open agenda of collaboration and offers examples of the action steps, community agents, possible activities, and results that could be expected. All components are based on the FANS model.

Table 1.
Summary of School and Community Collaborative Process

Actions	Agents	Activities	Results
1. Resource Collaborators	Mental Health Department, Schools	School-Based mental health program from agency personnel	Students' - social detractors addressed - cost efficient - Teacher support to issues affecting learning
2. Academic Support	Mental Health counselor: teachers: business leaders	After- school community tutorials for at-risk students	- Holistic services for targeted students group - improved academic mastery - community involvement with school
3. Demographics/ Environmental Scan	School Personnel	School demographics of discipline, attendance, grades; student surveys of needs	Voluntary support groups for social issues; divorce, conflict resolution, etc.
4. Focus Groups (Planning and acceptance)	Groups of 10-15 each of students, parents, staff, community leaders: collaborators	Information dialogues: - "What makes a good day at school for you?" - "Where do you go for help with a personal problem?" - "What is the worst impediment to school success in this community?"	-Qualitative data for program development -Identification of common concerns, areas of support
5. Funding	Collaborators: Community Resources	- Pool and restructure available funding - Share grant sources - Identify community funding sources or service deliverers	- Cost effectiveness - More services on-site for school and community

(Table 1 continued)

Table 1: Summary of School and Community Collaborative Process--continued

Table 1 (continued) Actions	Agents	Activities	Results
6. Program Development	Collaborators: Focus Groups	- Curriculum development of academic support program - Voluntary support groups for students, parents, teachers, social problems	- Cooperative spirit among school audience - Students' social and school needs addressed - Increased school participation - Parental support
7. Teacher Participation	Teachers; Collaborators	- In-school advisory board - Mentors for at-risk students	- Teacher buy-in - Pilot program participants - At-risk program established
8. Evaluative procedures	-Collaborators - Stakeholders	- Student service contract hours - Targeted efforts at specific school improvement - Conflict Resolution approaches	- Decrease in discipline offenses\suspensions - Improvement in drop-out rates - Volunteer Service hours
9. Evaluative Conferences	-Collaborators - Stakeholders	- formal review of evaluative procedures - Informal continuous assessments	- Action research data from school setting - Flexible program
10. Focus Groups	Mix of original and new participants	- Evaluation of original data questions	- Qualitative evaluation - Audience buy-in Response - Program Adaptation

Hidden Agenda

Following "ten easy steps" to school and community collaboration is tongue-in-cheek; the open agenda hides layers of needed political skills and networking that principals need to motivate others to unite. The hard part of collaboration is being politically savvy or sensitive to the working worlds and turf tussles of other professionals as well as to the infrastructure of education with its nearly terminal timidity in the face of change. It's very easy to step on the toes of outsiders and not know it. Learning their hierarchies and their agenda is paramount to the success of the collaborative process. Even though the project is a joint effort, the principal can assume the role of "host" because of the school being the site of service

delivery, and, thus, should attend graciously to many of his guests needs. It's just "politically correct"--and smart.

Some practical guidelines will help school personnel to overcome the dangers and pitfalls of the hidden agenda in collaboration. In summary, they are the following:

1. **Choose carefully the resource collaborators; make sure they "walk their talk."**
2. **Collaborate with political power at whatever level chosen: a "mover and shaker" who gets things done effectively and efficiently.**
3. **Keep things informal as much as possible.**
4. **Streamline meetings and hierarchies: keep everything simple.**
5. **"Be soft on people but hard on the problem".[1] Be aggressive in seeking creative solutions for joint problems; however, try to keep the peace with resource collaborators who may have different perspectives in problem-solving.**
6. **Keep focused on results, not on publicity.**
7. **Don't hesitate to change the program model approach if it isn't working.**
8. **THINK BIG, but plan and build in small stages.**

Effectively managing the issues of the hidden agenda fosters success in many arenas. Collaborative models demonstrated by FANS and SMART span multicultural, diversity, and gender issues because they address specifically shared problems of school and community. Student leaders emerge through expanded opportunities for personal and group expression. Parents express relief that collaborative efforts are focused on student achievement and emotional and physical welfare, including school safety issues. State agency personnel view school collaboration as a means of helping adolescents in proactive--not only reactive--ways. Last, but certainly not least, collaboration of community resources is extremely cost effective and results efficient for all agencies.

The New *How* of Ed-Admin

Programs such as FANS and SMART require an expanded leadership role of today's principal, one that acknowledges shared problems of school and society and one that requires confidence and skill in sharing the power to find solutions. University preparation programs must now help practitioners to build a sense of community, to coordinate agency resources for problem-solving, and to develop a holistic approach to comprehensive education within and beyond the school walls.

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[1]Katz, N. H., & Lawyer, J. W. (1993). *Conflict resolution: Building bridges.* Thousand Oaks, CA. Corwin Press, Inc.

Despite collaboration serving as a way to share the responsibilities of schooling today's youth, resistance still lives within some die-hard traditionalists who believe schools should *not* expand their roles to include collaboration. They chant, almost religiously, that schools should concentrate solely on basic skills and "that's not my job" to nurture and soothe a frazzled generation. Or, they simply feel powerless and don't know *what* to do, much less *how* to do it. The inability to discover creative approaches to school challenges convinces them that new ways aren't needed and that "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." But, fortunately, some practitioners do seek new approaches to alleviate school violence, student apathy, and community noninvolvement. Their dilemma is often in their repertoire of skills, not in their desire to make a difference.

If public school practitioners are to collaborate with community audiences for more effective schools, where do practitioners learn the *how* skills? They must learn them in educational administration programs that offer new explorations of the journeys today's schools take. Many practitioners are unfamiliar with conducting focus groups, are unable to network with community support agencies, and are unversed with their community's political savvys. Some of the programmatic restructuring in administrative programs to develop leadership skills could include the following:

- **Group Dynamics Skills**
  - Focus Groups
  - Agency politics
  - Networking
- **"Hands-On" Internships**
  - Community agency interactions
  - Additional demographics
- **Action Research Designs**
  - School success impediments
  - Leadership styles
- **Political Agenda Emphasis**
  - Relevant data
  - Influencing the influentials
  - Funding magic
  - Lobbying process
- **Leadership Assessment**
  - "Reach-out" skills
  - Management skills

Training school leaders in the skills required for collaboration will be difficult, for many of these skills are "soft," beyond measurable objectivity. Nevertheless, the success of collaboration depends on how these "soft, reach-out" skills are incorporated into the recipe

for school and community union. Administrative preparation programs must include development of skills, talents, and leadership styles needed in order to build a sense of community within and around the school. This restructuring will be a challenge for traditional, theory-based university programs...a challenge for adults but a reward for students of all ages.